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'Major Advance' in SALT Talks Is Announced by White House

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The White House announced yesterday "a major advance" toward a nuclear arms limitation pact with the Soviet Union, indicating that an agreement is near to limit land-based and submarine-based offensive missiles.

Without giving details, the White House announced that President Nixon and Soviet Communist Party Chief

Leonid I. Brezhnev had agreed to give new instructions to their SALT negotiators.

The announcement came after the President and his chief advisers met in the Cabinet Room with Gerard C. Smith to discuss "confidential exchanges" between the President and Brezhnev.

Smith departed for Helsinki, where the talks are being held, last night with his new instructions, and the White House said that the President is "confident" the Soviet delegate, Vladimir S. Semyonov, "will receive" new instructions from his government.

The White House statement also appeared to indicate that both major powers are continuing to try to prevent their conflict over Vietnam from halting negotiations in other areas.

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said that as a result of the new instructions, Mr. Nixon believes that an agreement "mutually acceptable to both sides" can be negotiated on the limitation of offensive and defensive weapons.

When asked whether the instructions cover missile-firing issue in the lengthy SALT negotiations, Ziegler replied that submarines, the key unsettled he could not discuss details but that he could say he was referring to "a major advance and a broadened scope of an offensive freeze."

The purpose of the recent exchanges between the President and Brezhnev "was to see whether the major remaining issues could be satisfactorily resolved so an agree-

ment covering offensive and defensive weapons could be completed at an early date," Ziegler said.

"On the basis of this exchange, the President has concluded that the possibilities of reaching agreement have been substantially increased."

Ziegler declined to say how often the President and Brezhnev have been in communication or to speculate on when an agreement might be concluded.

Another source said there would now be "a race against the clock" to put an agreement in final form by the time the President begins his Moscow meeting May 22.

Last May 20, the President announced that as a result of "negotiations involving the highest level of both governments" a deadlock in the Soviet-American arms limitation talks had been broken.

He said then that the two governments had agreed to limit both offensive and defensive weapons. Last month, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird said that the United States cannot accept a SALT agreement "without a ceiling on land and submarine-based missiles as well."

Agreement by the two superpowers to limit the size of their missile-firing fleets would not, however, rule out the future modernization of those fleets with still more advanced submarines and underwater missiles.

The United States is expected to continue work on its new ULMS (Underwater Long Range Missile System) project intended to produce a successor to the current Polaris/Poseidon fleet.

Similarly, the Soviets would be expected to continue work on a new class of vessels to carry improved versions of their sea-based missiles already being tested.

This type of modernization would be rationalized on the basis of replacing aging weapons with more modern ones, but on a basis which would not add numerically to either

The U.S. has had 41 missile subs in its fleet for several years. The Soviets now have about 25 operational with about 17 more under construction, for a total of 42.

Allowing the Soviets to complete those now under construction will produce rough parity in size between the two fleets, though the U.S. missiles and subs are both rated as superior in quality.

The United States has been pressing hard for inclusion of subs in any initial agreement, but the move, apparently until very recently, has been resisted by the Soviets. What if anything the United States gave up to gain this concession from the Soviets is not clear.

The Russians, however, already have a significant numerical edge over the United States in land-based offensive missiles, or ICBMs, by about 1,500 to 1,056.

The Soviets started construction on 91 additional ICBM silos between late in 1970 and late last summer.

Twenty-five of these are said to be for a new and very large Soviet missile which is expected to be tested soon, probably after the May summit meeting.

The rest of the holes are expected to house an improved version of the smaller and less threatening SS-11 ICBM.

The Russians already have 288 of the earlier and very large SS-9 ICBMs. Thus an Soviets about 313 large missiles which ultimately might threaten U.S. ICBMs in a surprise attack, this total, however, is within the guidelines that U.S. officials set almost two years ago in gauging what the U.S. could safely live with in the way of a Soviet threat.

Attending the White House meeting, in addition to the President and Smith, were Secretary of State William P. Rogers, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, Deputy Salt negotiator Lt. Gen. Royal Allison, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer,

chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CIA Director Richard Helms, Henry A. Kissinger, assistant for national security affairs, and Maj. Gen. Alexander M. Haig, deputy assistant.

They met for a little more than an hour. Mr. Nixon then conferred with Rogers on his trip this week to Europe to consult with allies prior to the President's Soviet trip.

When Ziegler was asked whether Kissinger would return to Europe with Smith, he said that he would no longer provide "any information on Dr. Kissinger's movements."

With Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese politburo member, having returned to Paris, it was believed that Kissinger soon would meet him there. They held a series of fruitless secret negotiations between 1969 and 1971 in an attempt to reach a Vietnam agreement.